DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 330 EA 020 046

AUTHOR Rees, Ruth
TITLE Delegation--A Fundamental Management Process.
PUB DATE Jun 87
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Administrators; Elementary Secondary Education; *Job Enrichment; *Noninstructional Responsibility; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Delegation of Tasks

ABSTRACT

Administrators may employ delegation to perform work effectively, increase their own effectiveness, and advance the development of subordinates through job enrichment. The steps in the delegation process include task identification, assessment of skills necessary to execute the task, selection of the subordinate for the task, communication of the task, assignment of the task and the resources for executing it, monitoring, and feedback to the subordinate. Because ambiguities regarding the subordinate's role may result in stress, a distinction should be drawn between routine work and delgated work. Administrators should ensure that delegated work is distributed equally, assign an appropriate degree of authority, ensure that subordinates have equal growth opportunity, and consider job enrichment. Benefits of delegation to the organization include increased results and productivity, faster reactions to various situations, more employees with a broader knowledge of the organization, better communication, clear policies, less employee turnover, and a fuller use of personnel. Delegation benefits administrators in that they may use their time more efficiently. Finally, benefits to subordinates include less stress on the job, increased capabilities, more responsibility and autonomy, increased self-esteem, involvement in professional development, the use of otherwise dormant skills, increased motivation and job satisfaction, and less staff turnover. Twenty-one references are included. (RG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED294330

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ruth Rees

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

DELEGATION

A FUNDAMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROCESS

by

RUTH REES, PHD

Faculty of Education

Queen's University at Kingston, Canada

June 1987

EA020 016

DELEGATION - A FUNDAMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROCESS

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this paper is to encourage educational administrators to use one of the more fundamental managerial processes available to them--that of delegation. The reason for doing so is three-fold: one, the most basic concern in any organization, to complete the assigned work effectively; two, to increase the manager's own level of effectiveness within the organization; and three, to promote the continuous development of subordinates through job enrichment.

The existing literature on delegation provides many more specific reasons than those three above as the benefits of delegation. Also the literature offers much rationale as to why delegation is not ongoing within organizations. Yet, two aspects of this topic remain unclear--a working definition of delegation and the steps which constitute the delegation process. It appears that the literature has concentrated on the reasons for this process occurring or not occurring, rather than <u>how</u> the delegation process actually does occur. Furthermore, much writing is devoted to the obstacles which prevent delegation rather than focussing on suggestions to overcome these roadblocks and thus improve the delegation process. Consequently, this article is an attempt at rectifying the situation. The "black hat" of the critical academic will be substituted with the "green hat" of the constructive proactivist (De Bono, 1985).

Hence, in order to encourage managers to use the delegation process, the paper will address three aspects of the topic. First, an operating definition of delegation will be offered. Second, the steps

that comprise its process will be outlined. Third, the benefits of delegation will be highlighted, in order to entice management with the usefulness and relevance of this process as an art and a science. Educators, regardless of their management level within the system, should not only recognize the assets of this process but also how they can use this fundamental management process to their own advantage.

DEFINITION

Why do writers continue to produce articles in which the terms they use are not defined? Perhaps a reason is that too detailed a definition would be risky in that it would interest only a small yet very specific audience. Or perhaps the reason is that the (arbitrary) constraints or assumptions made when clarifying a term might render it less generalizable or less applicable to its projected users. Whatever the reason, few of the authors on the subject have put forth definitions of delegation. Those exceptions have been the American Management Association (1984), Caruth (1983), Caruth and Pressley (1984), Ford (1983), Hodge and Anthony (1979), and Stoner (1978). They have differed in depth and level of applicability.

Although some would argue that educators are not risk-takers, this educator puts herself on the line by committing to paper a working definition of delegation. Delegation is defined here as:

> the supervisory process of assigning additional, specific, and meaningful duties (responsiblity) and commensurate authority and accountability to subordinate(s) so that the assigned work is completed effectively and that the employees [both management and subordinates] feel that their time and talents have been used

wisely.

This definition is closest to those put forth by the American Management Association (p. 1) and Caruth and Pressley (p. 6). Indeed, the latter authors call the above "positive delegation."

Some of the writers contend that delegation is the distribution of work among employees within the organization. However, in this paper the initial and formal assignment of work, as in the form of position descriptions for example, is excluded from discussion. Furthermore, only the manager's subordinates are considered here as potential delegatees. And the purposes of delegation are threefold, as stated previously--to benefit the organization, the manager, and the subordinate.

Each aspect of the definition merits an explanation. First, delegation is perceived not as a solitary action, but as a managerial process involving a series of steps. In brief, the steps consist of:

1. task identification,
2. analysis of skills required to complete the task,
3. selection of subordinate(s) for task assignment,
4. communication of task and its performance criteria,
5. assignment of task and the necessary resources in order to accomplish the task,
6. outlining and following monitoring procedures, and
7. providing feedback to the delegatee.

Each of these seven stages will be explained in more detail in a subsequent section of this paper.

Next, this definition reinforces the notion that the formal or ritualized responsibilities accorded to each member of the organization

fall outside the purview of a delegated task. As quoted from the American Management Association, "When ongoing [permanent] responsibilities are delegated, it is no longer simple delegation; it is job designing or redesigning" (p. 8).

In order to help differentiate between the two types of work assignments (normal or formalized versus delegated or extra), the prerequisite is that every employee receives a formal description of the duties that comprise his or her position. And there does appear to be some evidence of this trend. Within many of the school boards in Ontario, the assistant principal's roles, which traditionally have been vague and left up to the principal for assignment, are now in the process of being specified and formally documented. Indeed, a lack of clarity or ambiguity of roles has been attributed to stress within the organization (Kahn et al., 1964). Consequently, a subsidiary benefit of delegation may be a reduction of stress perceived by the members of the institution.

Each supervisor, by the power of that position, does have the right to delegate--to request that every subordinate carry out additional work assignments. This power, however, must be taken neither lightly nor indiscriminately. First of all, the supervisor must be careful to ensure that this extra division of labour is allocated equitably. Secondly, the supervisor must assign not just the duty but also commensurate authority in order to give the delegatee every opportunity of completing the task with a fair degree of success. And finally, the supervisor, the one who is ultimately accountable, is also responsible for ensuring that monitoring occurs.

But the successful completion of the task or duty must not be the only objective for delegating. Equally if not more important is the objective of developing the personnel within the organization (human resource development). Consequently, the manager must take care that subordinates have equal opportunity for growth. Furthermore, job enrichment, improving the quality of work life, for both the manager and the subordinates must be taken into consideration.

STEPS IN THE DELEGATION PROCESS

Delegation is a process, not a discrete act of empowerment. As a process, it includes several steps which are detailed below.

The first, task identification, is the clarification of the task itself. This involves the manager providing a clear definition of the task complete with objectives. Some even suggest that the task to be delegated actually be written out to ensure that it is able to be communicated, specific, and finite. Also it must be part of the ongoing responsibilities of the manager alone, one that does not involve peers of the manager or people outside of the realm of authority of the manager. But the re-assignment of those things that only a manager is empowered to do cannot be delegated, such as subordinate supervision, hiring, staff discipline, or crisis management.

Managers have many tasks to do, but they do not necessarily have all the skills or special knowledge required to do everything within their position descriptions. Neither do they have the time nor the inclination to do all that is required of them. Consequently, the suggestion is that tasks which could be delegated are routine or repetitive tasks, tasks which involve special competencies or specific

resources which the manager does not have, tasks which have been identified as relevant to their subordinates' needs or interests, and tasks requiring more time or attention than the manager can afford.

The second step is for the manager to analyze the task to determine what skills or levels of expertise are required in order to accomplish the task effectively. As such, the context of the task must be assessed. Is this a highly visible task which must be performed expertly or precisely? What time limit and other resources are involved? Can the organization afford to use the opportunity to provide training for a subordinate, knowing that correcting mistakes and in so doing expending more resources are part of the learning process? One of the excuses for not delegating is the manager's lack of time to provide the subordinate with the training to do the task. In that case, it would appear that the manager is not viewing the organization in the long term. Yes, if none of the subordinates has the necessary skills, training must be provided; but a crisis situation is not the appropriate opportunity for training to occur.

Accordingly, the third step in the process is selecting the subordinate who will be delegated the task. This is a crucial step in the process. The concern is not only that the job is accomplished properly, but that the delegatee does not look upon the task as onerous but rather as part of his or her professional growth and job enrichment. Moreover, the assignment of tasks should not be based on favoritism or harassment (Blase & Matthews, 1984). Although one subordinate may have the appropriate skills for the job, that person should not always be relied upon. All other subordinates deserve comparable opportunities for growth.

Depending upon the nature or complexity of the task, the context of the task itself, and the interest, needs, and abilities of the subordinates, the supervisor must decide who should be selected so that all might benefit--the delegator, the delegatee, and the organization as a whole. In one instance, if expert knowledge is the critical factor, it is suggested that the manager should select the subordinate at the lowest level of the organization who has sufficient ability and information to carry out the task competently (e.g., The Art of Delegation, 1982; Stoner, 1978). The American Management Association suggests, however, that that if a subordinate is either the cause of or part of a problem, then that employee be the one delegated the task. This technique is known as cooptation.

In another instance, delegation can be implemented in order to effect the long-term development of one's staff. If so, the suggestion is that the delegatee be chosen based on the individual's needs: to use different skills or professional competencies than those routinely used; to acquire increased autonomy, recognition, or self-esteem; or perhaps to make a self-assessment of one's own growth potential or interest in another position within the organization (Vinton, 1987). Moreover, if a subordinate has a special or vested interest in a project or issue, then than person should be chosen as the delegatee (American Management Association, Vinton).

What becomes evident from the above three steps in the process is that managers must have not only a detailed knowledge of the task itself, but also an intimate knowledge of their subordinates--to include their current work load, their areas of expertise, their career aspirations, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Helping

subordinates move toward their career goals and using their strengths as well as reducing their areas of weakness is just one part of the manager's job. Selecting a suitable person to carry out a specific task presents an added layer of complexity. Unfortunately, there is no absolute criteria to determine the suitability of a subordinate for delegation; those criteria can vary considerably, depending on the particular situation.

The fourth step in the delegation process is to communicate both the task and its performance criteria to the selected subordinate. The goals of the task should be explicated, but not the method for accomplishing those goals. That should be left to the discretion of the delegatee. And not only should the goals of the task be explained in detail but also clarification should be provided of the resources available and those performance standards which would be considered acceptable, to include the completion date. As well, contingencies must be taken into account (Knoop & Common, 1985). And if the task is part of a larger one, the delegated assignment must be explained in context. What is essential at this step is that the subordinate fully understands the task and what is expected of her/him. Communication, then, is central to effective delegation (Taylor, 1984).

The fifth step is one which is often missing in the delegation process. The necessary resources must be allocated to the delegatee so that the task can be accomplished with the maximum likelihood of success. Hodge and Anthony stress that responsibility cannot be assigned without accompanying authority being handed over as well. What this means is that the manager must communicate to the other employees that this individual has been delegated a task and the necessary formal

power to carry it out. It does not give the delegatee the right, however, to re-assign the task to others. But this authority does allow for the acquisition of certain information, equipment, or assistance from other personnel. And as the task unfolds and these resources are clearly identified, the channels of communication must be established so that the delegatee can readily obtain those resources.

The sixth step in the process of delegation involves yet another process--that of monitoring. Not only must the delegatee be aware of the performance standards of the task, but how and when these standards will assessed. Regular meetings between the delegator and the delegatee are suggested or, as in project management, meetings held after each of the milestones or major subtasks is accomplished. The manager must be kept up-to-date as to the success of the assignment. To be informed on the deadline that the task is not completed or not finished successfully, is too late for the manager to do anything but react. And small errors are easier and faster to correct than larger ones. The manager, in conjunction with the subordinate, must establish these monitoring procedures; ultimately though, it is the manager who must ensure that these feedback channels are operating. Although some authors would disagree, depending on the levels of delegation (Knoop & Common, Stoner, Vinton), the manager's question should be "How's it going?" rather than the moan of "Why didn't you tell me [that something went wrong]?"

And finally, the seventh step in the delegation process is that of providing feedback to the delegatee. Since it is likely that the subordinate will have taken on the task for a particular reason, the manager must remember to respond appropriately. Feedback, in order to

guarantee its reception, must be immediate, specific, and constructive. If, for example, the reason for taking on an additional task was to assess another position within the organization, both the manager and the subordinate should to do some long range planning. If the subordinate attempted a task using a new skill for the first time, then an evaluation of the successs of that attempt should be made. The manager must be aware of what motivates the subordinate and then reward appropriately.

The manager's job is getting things done through other people. That job entails picking the most appropriate person for the effective accomplishment of a specific task. By delegating, a temporary assignment of the task may occur. What may evolve eventually, however, as an outcome of delegation, is the formal revising of position descriptions throughout the organization in order to facilitate a more permanent and more effective allocation of tasks among the existing personnel. This is just one of the many benefits of the delegation process. A more comprehensive list of those benefits are provided below.

BENEFITS OF DELEGATING

To help convince managers, and in particular educational managers, that it is worthwhile to persist in carrying out the process of delegation, the merits of delegating are outlined below. They will be arranged in accordance with each of the three beneficiaries: the organization, the manager, and the subordinate.

Benefits to the Organization

As with every other management process, the ultimate benefit of delegation is to help ensure the viability of the organization. The concern for the organization is for its survival (maintaining) and growth (development, renewal). Delegation contributes to both aspects. Delegation is of benefit to the organization in that it promotes:

1. Increased results, as the more appropriate person is carrying out the task effectively;

2. Less slowdown of productivity within the organization as more than one person is capable of doing any job;

3. Faster responses to a variety of situations as the manager knows exactly which subordinates have certain skills and competencies (American Management Association);

4. More employees to have a wider knowledge of the organization through their increased participation in task accomplishment and decision-making (Hoy & Sousa, 1984);

5. Improved communication (Hodge & Anthony, 1979);

6. Clear policies and procedures (Hodge & Anthony);

7. Lower employee turnover (The art of delegation, 1982), and hence less organizational overheads associated with staff recruitment and orientation;

8. A fuller use of personnel (Hollingworth & Al-Jarary, 1983);

9. Trust (Caruth & Pressley);

10. The transformation of its personnel (growth through training and learning opportunities where mistakes are allowed as part of this developmental process); and

11. More loyal employees (teachers), (Hoy & Sousa).

Benefits to the Manager

The benefits to the manager are several. In general, those benefits can be summarized as allowing the manager to use her/his time more effectively. Specifically, these benefits are:

1. To build rather than merely to run the organization (Matthews, 1984), by attending to creative rather than only maintenance activities;

2. To carry out tasks that only the manager has the authority to do, those which cannot be delegated, such as hiring, disciplining, firing, supervising;

3. To tackle assignments for which the manager alone has the necessary skills and competencies;

4. To spend more time and attention on tasks specific and unique to that position;

5. To clarify tasks and their necessary resources;

6. To plan for task accomplishment, rather than management by crisis;

7. To promote trust and a sharing by demonstrating that the manager is dependent upon the skills and competencies of those personnel within the organization;

8. To reduce the stress on management (Ashkensas & Schaffer, 1982);

9. To promote the visible presence of the manager throughout the organization, particularly in the active monitoring phase of the process (MBWA--management by walking about);

10. To encourage long term planning of personnel development;

11. To facilitate the manager's increased knowledge of subordinates--their needs and wants, and areas of strengths and

weaknesses; and

12. To be perceived as being less autocratic (Hoy & Sousa).

Benefits to the Subordinates

And the third group who benefits from the delegation process are subordinates, those who are known as the delegatees. They benefit from the process by:

1. Having less stress on the job, through role and task clarification (Blase & Matthews);

2. Being trained on the job and hence increasing their competencies and knowledge base;

3. Receiving more responsibility and autonomy;

4. Developing increased self-esteem and self-confidence;

5. Participating in a process of continuous professional development;

6. Learning to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses;

7. Being recognized for and using their distinctive skills and competencies which might lie dormant otherwise because they are supplementary to their permanent organizational responsibilities;

8. Having increased initiative, motivation, and job satisfaction through their recognized contribution to organizational growth; and

9. Having less of a staff turnover.

The benefits of delegating additional, specific, and meaningful work to one's subordinates, then, should allow each member of the organization to make more effective use of the employee's time and talents during the work day. As well , it should facilitate the organization to make more effective use of each of its members. The

synergistic result of all this should be the increased effectiveness and productivity of the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

As Getzels and Guba wrote,

> The unique task of administration [management]...is to integrate the demands of the institution with the demands of the staff members in a way that is at once organizationally productive and individually fulfilling. (1957, p. 430)

Hence delegation can be viewed as a process fundamental to the art and craft of management. The seven steps for carrying out the delegation process have been outlined above. Through that process, management can work towards both organizational viability and personnel development--to improve the effectiveness of the manager as well as the subordinates.

In conclusion, delegation is considered to be a rewarding constructive process, demonstrating the proactive visionary side of the manager as leader. The myth that it indicates weakness on the part of the manager is <u>not</u> substantiated. And its benefits surely outweigh any additional organizational costs.

Does delegation occur within <u>your</u> organization? As an unique area of management, it is **your** responsibility to ensure that it does.

REFERENCES

American Management Association. (1984). How to delegate effectively. Executive Skills. 7(84-1), 1-16.

The art of delegation. (1982). Small Business Report. 7(11,12), 23-27.

Ashkenas, R.N. & Schaffer, R.H. (1982). Managers can avoid wasting time. Harvard Business Review. 60(3), 98-104.

Blase, J.J. & Matthews, K. (1984, December). How principals stress teachers. The Canadian School Executive. 8-11.

Caruth, D. & Middleworth, B. (1983). How to delegate successfully. Supervisory Management. 28(2), 36-42.

Caruth, D. & Pressley, T.A. (1984). Key factors in positive delegation. Supervisory Management. 29(7), 6-11.

De Bono, E. (1985). Six thinking hats. Toronto: Key Porter Books.

Ford, R.C. (1983). Delegation without fear. Supervisory Management. 28(7), 2-8.

Getzels, J.W. & Guba, E.G. (1957). Social behavior and the administrative process. School Review, 65(4), 423-441.

Gibson, J.L., Ivancevich, J.M., & Donnelly Jr., J.H. (1974). Organizations: Behavior, structure, process. Dallas: Business, 255-256.

Hodge, G.J. & Anthony, W.P. (1979). The role of delegation, (ch. 11). Organization theory. An environmental approach. Toronto: Allyn & Bacon. 341-353.

Hollingsworth, A.T & Al-Jarary, A.R.A. (1983). Why supervisors don't delegate and employees won't accept responsibility. Supervisory Management. 28(4), 12-17.

Hoy, W.K. & Sousa, D.A. (1984). Delegation: The neglected aspect of participation in decision-making. Alberta Journal of Educational Research. 30(4), 320-331.

Kahn, R., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R.P., Snoek, J.D., & Rosenthal, R.A. (1964). Organizational stress. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Knoop, R. & Common. R. (1985). Should you delegate? Or invite participation? Education Canada. 25(3), 4-9.

Maidment, R. (1984). Ten reasons why managers need to know more about delegation. Supervisory Management. 29(8), 8-11.

McMahon, J. (1983). How managers motivate. Supervision. 45(4), 3-4.

Matthews, G.H. (1984). Run your business or build an organization? Harvard Business Review. 62(2), 34-44.

Stoner, J.A.F. (1978). Management. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 276-282.

Taylor, H.L. (1984). Delegate. New York: Beaufort Books.

Vinton, D. (1987). Delegation for employee development. Training and Development Journal. 41(1), 65-67.